Lesson Plan

Avenues to Advocacy: Congressional Visit Workshop

Length:
1 hour – 1.5 hours

Objectives:
Through this activity participants will:
• Gain a greater understanding of the important role that individuals who meet with elected representatives play in the overall advocacy mission.
• Work through provided guidelines to practice role-play scenarios that replicate meetings with legislators about a specific issue.

Summary:
This lesson is designed to enable participants to act on their advocacy education from What Is Advocacy? by researching, brainstorming, and role-playing using specific issues that they will be discussing with their legislators.

Materials:
• Tips for Congressional Visits handout
• How To Set Up Congressional Visits handout
• Optional reference: Advocacy Process handout

Preparation:
Determine ahead of time how the issues of focus will be chosen and assigned. Choose a selection (number dependent upon size of class) of relevant issues either from the community or from the Catholics Confront Global Poverty (CCGP) website, or have participants brainstorm ideas for relevant issues from the community or from independent experiences or research. Issues can then be assigned to groups, or participants can select which issue they would like to focus on.

(If used in sequence with the Avenues to Advocacy: Letter-Writing Workshop, participants can remain in their original groups and use their issues of focus for this Congressional Visit Workshop.)

Option: If you choose to select the issues ahead of time, you may want to provide some relevant information to participants when assigning issues in order to streamline the research process. Visit the CCGP website, and click on Action Center to find relevant topics and general contextual and applicable legislative information.
Process:

Advocacy Process Review (optional)
Refer back to the Advocacy Process handout (used in How Does Advocacy Work? Lesson Plan) to emphasize the role congressional visits play in the advocacy process in impacting and moving forward legislative action.

Picking a Group and an Issue
Break the class into groups for addressing each topic; adjust the number of issues based on size of the group (the class should be divided into groups of 4-6 people with each group focusing on a different issue). Assign or establish issues of focus to each group for their congressional visit. (If using this lesson in sequence with Avenues to Advocacy: Letter-Writing Workshop, consider having participants complete the activity with the same group and same issue of focus.)

Research
Instruct participants to research context and any political action currently directed toward their chosen issue. (You may want to provide applicable background information to streamline the research portion of this activity).

Tips for Congressional Visit
Before beginning the activity, review the Tips for Congressional Visits handout. Emphasize that all group members should have a chance to participate in Steps 2 through 4 (the action steps that pertain to the actual meeting).

Brainstorm
Allow groups to brainstorm about their upcoming congressional “visit,” focusing on the research that they have done and any personal connections that they may have with the issue.

Brainstorming time should address both the content that participants want to present and the way in which they want to present it.

Note: Remind participants that personal connections do not necessarily mean that the student has to have been directly impacted by the issue—perhaps they have been hearing about an issue in the news or from friends or family, or maybe they just feel that as Catholics they have been called to advocate for a particular issue.

Role-Play
Have participants engage in their mock congressional meetings one group at a time while the other groups observe and the teacher (or another appropriate facilitator, e.g., school administrator, parent volunteer, etc.) acts as the legislator or a member of his/her staff. The “legislator” does not necessarily need to have advance knowledge of the issue (though it may be helpful), but he/she should be prepared to prompt participants during conversations in a way that seems natural.

Option: The “legislator” may want to present a variety of reactions that participants in a real meeting could encounter, such as:

- The legislator acts interested, but is not particularly informed about the issue. (The facilitator should encourage participants to explain some of the background, and ask if there are other resources available to stay up-to-date on this issue.)
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- Work through provided guidelines to practice role-play scenarios that replicate meetings with legislators about a specific issue.

Summary:
This lesson is designed to enable participants to act on their advocacy education from *What Is Advocacy?* by researching, brainstorming, and role-playing using specific issues that they will be discussing with their legislators.

Materials:
- **Tips for Congressional Visits** handout
- **How To Set Up Congressional Visits** handout
- Optional reference: *Advocacy Process* handout

Preparation:
Determine ahead of time how the issues of focus will be chosen and assigned. Choose a selection (number dependent upon size of class) of relevant issues either from the community or from the [Catholics Confront Global Poverty (CCGP) website](https://www.cccgp.org/action-center), or have participants brainstorm ideas for relevant issues from the community or from independent experiences or research. Issues can then be assigned to groups, or participants can select which issue they would like to focus on.

*(If used in sequence with the Avenues to Advocacy: Letter-Writing Workshop, participants can remain in their original groups and use their issues of focus for this Congressional Visit Workshop.)*

Option: If you choose to select the issues ahead of time, you may want to provide some relevant information to participants when assigning issues in order to streamline the research process. Visit the CCGP website, and click on Action Center to find relevant topics and general contextual and applicable legislative information.
Process:

Advocacy Process Review (optional)
Refer back to the Advocacy Process handout (used in How Does Advocacy Work? Lesson Plan) to emphasize the role congressional visits play in the advocacy process in impacting and moving forward legislative action.

Picking a Group and an Issue
Break the class into groups for addressing each topic; adjust the number of issues based on size of the group (the class should be divided into groups of 4-6 people with each group focusing on a different issue). Assign or establish issues of focus to each group for their congressional visit. *(If using this lesson in sequence with Avenues to Advocacy: Letter-Writing Workshop, consider having participants complete the activity with the same group and same issue of focus.)*

Research
Instruct participants to research context and any political action currently directed toward their chosen issue. *(You may want to provide applicable background information to streamline the research portion of this activity).*

Tips for Congressional Visit
Before beginning the activity, review the Tips for Congressional Visits handout. Emphasize that all group members should have a chance to participate in Steps 2 through 4 (the action steps that pertain to the actual meeting).

Brainstorm
Allow groups to brainstorm about their upcoming congressional “visit,” focusing on the research that they have done and any personal connections that they may have with the issue.

Brainstorming time should address both the content that participants want to present and the way in which they want to present it.

*Note: Remind participants that personal connections do not necessarily mean that the student has to have been directly impacted by the issue—perhaps they have been hearing about an issue in the news or from friends or family, or maybe they just feel that as Catholics they have been called to advocate for a particular issue.*

Role-Play
Have participants engage in their mock congressional meetings one group at a time while the other groups observe and the teacher (or another appropriate facilitator, e.g., school administrator, parent volunteer, etc.) acts as the legislator or a member of his/her staff. The “legislator” does not necessarily need to have advance knowledge of the issue (though it may be helpful), but he/she should be prepared to prompt participants during conversations in a way that seems natural.

*Option: The “legislator” may want to present a variety of reactions that participants in a real meeting could encounter, such as:*
- The legislator acts interested, but is not particularly informed about the issue. *(The facilitator should encourage participants to explain some of the background, and ask if there are other resources available to stay up-to-date on this issue.)*
• The legislator respectfully disagrees with the position that the participants present. (The facilitator should politely disagree, and express his/her opinion that a certain position is not the best way to combat the issue at hand. During the debriefing after this scenario, it is important to remind participants that advocacy is a process; not every meeting will be an immediate "win," but it is very important that they make their voices heard.)

Reflection
After each group works through their role-play, ask the participants who are observing to identify things that they think the role-play group did well and what they could work on to become even more effective. Encourage participants to highlight specific things that align with the Tips for Congressional Visits handout.

Debrief
Conduct a group discussion with all participants to wrap up the activity. Ask them to share what they learned from the handouts and their "congressional visit." Discuss next steps to engage their actual members of Congress in advocacy. Pass out the How to Set Up Congressional Visits handout so that participants can use what they’ve learned to meet with their government representatives.
Handout:
Congressional Visit Workshop:
Setting Up Your Visit

Step One: Make a Game Plan
- Learn about your legislators by checking out their websites (Google them or go to house.gov or senate.gov) and researching their positions and voting records on past issues (especially ones that pertain to your issue).
- Plan on calling to schedule your meeting 4 to 6 weeks in advance; pick several dates and times that would work.
- Be aware that you may be meeting with a staff member and not the representative or senator him/herself. This is still a very important meeting, because the staff member provides the legislator with information about the issue.

Step Two: Make Your Request
- Call to schedule your meeting; have several options ready for meeting dates and times.
- Emphasize the fact that you are a constituent, and if your issue has local or state applications, make sure to emphasize that as well.
- Be ready to provide contact information and basic information about why you’d like to meet: briefly explain what you would like to discuss and provide as many logistical details as possible.
- Try to request a meeting when there are no “hot button” issues that may make your legislator’s office busier than normal.

Step Three: Be Persistent and Follow Through
- If you have tried to call and received no response, try using a variety of different methods of communication to reach out to your member (call, e-mail, web forms, etc.) because some offices may respond to one type of communication better than another.
- Once scheduled, a couple of days before your meeting, call or e-mail the office to confirm the meeting you scheduled

Step Four: Follow Up
- Make sure to send a thank-you letter to your legislator, and provide any additional information that he/she may have requested or may help him/her to better understand the issue and your position.
- Continue to engage with your legislator by attending town halls, inviting your legislator to relevant local events and maintaining communication.
Handout

Congressional Visit Workshop: Tips for Your Visit

Step 1: Plan It Out
• Make sure that before you go into a meeting, you have done your research and know how you want to present your issue. Brainstorming and role-playing your meeting ahead of time can ensure that you feel ready.

Step 2: Identify Yourself
• Explain that you are a constituent, and talk about your school, church and/or organization that inspired your passion about this issue and desire to meet and discuss it.

Step 3: Work Together
• One of the greatest advantages to meeting in a group setting is that you can share information and discussion among group members. Brainstorming and role-playing ahead of time will ensure that you know how to best address your topic as a group and share crucial information.

Step 4: Ask
• Be specific about what action you are asking your legislator to take. This may involve some additional research if there is current legislation going through Congress, or you can provide suggestions based on your own research on the issue. Make sure to ASK if she/he will support you!

Step 5: Debrief and Follow-Up
• Discuss with your group how the meeting went so that everyone is on the same page about what the legislator said, and whether you all feel that you were successful. Make sure to send a thank-you note or e-mail—this is both polite and helps to establish a relationship with that office. Also, let us know how the visit went by completing and submitting the online report at confrontglobalpoverty.org/act/toolkit/district-visit-form

Step 6: Celebrate!
• See? Meeting with congressional representatives isn't nearly as scary or intimidating as you might think. Celebrate that your voice makes a difference, and that you are playing a major role in advocating for your issue—and for others!
Lesson Plan

Avenues To Advocacy: Letter Writing

Length:
1 hour – 1.5 hours

Objectives:
Through this activity participants will:

• Gain a greater understanding about the role of letter-writing campaigns in the overall advocacy mission.
• Work through provided guidelines to write letters to their respective senators and/or representatives about a specific issue.

Summary:
This lesson is designed to enable participants to act on their advocacy education from What Is Advocacy? by researching, discussing, drafting and sending letters addressing specific issues to their senators and/or to their representatives.

Materials:

• Pens, paper, envelopes and stamps for writing and mailing letters
• Tips for Advocacy: Letter Writing handout
• Optional reference: Advocacy Process handout
• Contact information for legislators to whom the letters are being written
  (Option: Use the Catholics Confront Global Poverty zip code lookup resource to identify your senators and representatives, but also consider engaging with state and local elected officials whose contact information should be easily found online.)

Preparation:
Determine ahead of time how the issues of focus are chosen and assigned. Choose a selection (number dependent upon size of class) of relevant issues either from the community or from the Catholics Confront Global Poverty website, or have participants brainstorm ideas for relevant issues from the community or from independent experiences or research. Issues can then be assigned to groups, or participants can select which issues on which they would like to focus.

Option: If you choose to select the issues ahead of time, you may want to provide some relevant information to participants when assigning issues in order to streamline the research process. Visit the CCGP website and click on Action Center to find relevant topics and general contextual and applicable legislative information.